



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK APRIL 19-25

Next week (April 19-25) is National Volunteer Week. It is a great opportunity to celebrate the impact of volunteer service and the power of volunteers to tackle society's greatest challenges, to build stronger communities and be a force that transforms the world.

Today, as people strive to lead lives that reflect their values, the expression of civic life has evolved. Whether online, at the office, or the local food bank; whether with a vote, a voice, or a wallet – doing good comes in many forms, - let us recognize and celebrate them all.

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs would like to do a big SHOUT OUT to all the volunteers that donate time, energy and the gifts they provide to all our veterans. Special thanks to all our partners that volunteer thousands of hours at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home each year.

Edith Wharton once said, "There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it."

Partners volunteering to assist our veterans, thank you for being our candle and our mirror!



### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

SDCF COVID-19 Fund .....	2
DOH Secretary Message .....	3
DAV Relief Fund .....	4
Skinner Joins SDDVA Team .....	4
VA Benefits .....	5
VA Appeals.....	6
CARES Act Housing Funds .....	7
CARES Act Issues re Veterans .....	8
Telemental Health .....	9
Social Security Update.....	10
Purple Up .....	11
Mask Update.....	12
Purple Up .....	13
Upcoming Events.....	14

# SDCF CORONA VIRUS RESPONSE FUND

*A message from South Dakota Community Foundation President and CEO*

As a statewide community foundation, we work to serve and strengthen communities across South Dakota every day. We are committed to working with communities and nonprofits as they deal with the myriad of issues posed by the coronavirus.

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to our partners, and together with your help, we will continue to build a stronger South Dakota. Please continue to visit this webpage. We will provide updates here as the situation progresses.

Thank you,

Stephanie Judson, President and CEO



In our efforts to aid communities and nonprofits in need due to the coronavirus outbreak, we have established the Coronavirus Response Fund. The Fund will provide support to verified nonprofits and community organizations directly addressing the needs of those affected by the virus. We are still not certain of the longer-term effects the situation will have on our partners, but we are working to respond as needs arise.

Examples of immediate need:

- Access to food. With recent school closures, many children are missing out on daily food service and access to weekend backpack programs.
- Shortage of volunteers. Social distancing protocol has many stepping back from their volunteer duties, requiring many nonprofits to reevaluate how they deliver services to those in need.
- Healthcare sector support. Coronavirus poses unique challenges to educating, diagnosing and treating patients.

Human services sector support. Many families are in need of child care and other supportive services.

To learn more, visit: <https://sdcommunityfoundation.org/covid-19/>

**SOUTH DAKOTA**  
**COMMUNITY FOUNDATION**

# MESSAGE FROM SD DOH SECRETARY

As South Dakotans, taking care of each other isn't just something we do, it is who we are. The need to care for each other holds our families together and brings out the best in our communities. Caring begins with knowing and relating to how others feel. And the feelings our families and households are facing right now are all over the place. They may include anger, compassion, apathy, generosity, kindness, anxiety, fear and even selfishness. It's important to know all of these feelings are acceptable and ok.

We are living during an unprecedented time and uncharted decisions are being made. Our response to COVID has been based on facts and science and is rapidly evolving. There's no play book. But the one thing that has been constant is the team of public health workers concerned about the needs of every person in our state. They are servant leaders who have been working tirelessly to put their fellow neighbors first. It is heartwarming to see how hard they are working. Governor Noem has wholeheartedly supported the public health response to COVID-19 in our state. This week, during National Public Health Week, we recognize the contributions of public health workers in our state and across the country. And we appreciate the recognition and support you have poured out to us. Our awesome team continues to work around the clock and around the state because, frankly, so are you.

Thank you to the health care workers, police officers, firefighters, grocery store workers, gas station attendants, day care providers and many other individuals who go to work with a brave heart and a warm smile without giving it a second thought. Thank you to businesses who have figured out ways to continue to operate while ensuring people aren't at risk of being exposed.

Thank you to the leaders of our health care systems who are planning ahead to make sure they can take care of the people who will need it.

Thank you to churches and fellowship leaders across the state who have wisely moved services and activities online. Thanks to you, many in our communities will not risk being exposed during their times of worship.

To the businesses who have had to close, I know this was not your choice. You didn't want to have to lay off employees or lock your doors. The routine services you provide in each of the communities across the state are part of our daily lives. No one wanted to see this happen and we continue to thank you for your contributions to our great state.

Lastly, a big thank you to South Dakotans for listening and staying calm. By staying home, social distancing, washing your hands, reducing exposure and doing the right thing, you have made a commitment to help slow the spread of COVID-19. And because you are listening, you are making a difference.

We are not through this yet. As Governor Noem has said, this is a marathon and not a sprint. But, I can promise you that my team at the state health department is committed to working hard until we are on the downward side of this curve. And when that happens, we will work some more because of you, your thoughtfulness and your support. You are the priority. Your loved ones, your friends and your neighbors are the people that my team and I care about too.

I will close with this. A couple of weeks ago, I was very tired. My team was tired. People close to me were feeling stressed out. And then my assistant showed me a card I had received in the mail. And on the cover of that note there was a definition of teamwork defined by Margaret Mead. It read "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

# DAV RELIEF FUND

The Disabled American Veterans organization is establishing a [COVID-19 Relief Fund](#) to provide help to service-connected disabled veterans who have lost employment or income.

Similar to the DAV's traditional [Disaster Relief program](#), DAV will be distributing grants to provide aid to eligible disabled veterans and their families impacted by COVID-19.

To donate to the [COVID-19 Relief Fund](#), or to learn how to apply for a grant, please visit <https://www.dav.org/covidrelief/>.



**URGENT:** Help us reach our critical goal of \$2.5 million to help veterans affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.



## SKINNER JOINS SDDVA TEAM

Thomas Skinner has joined the SDDVA team and will be working with our staff at the Sioux Falls Claims Office.

Tom is a 22 year army veteran and looks forward to assisting our veterans and their families.

Tom's email address is as follows: [Thomas.Skinner1@VA.gov](mailto:Thomas.Skinner1@VA.gov) and he can be reached at 605-333-6869.

Please join us in welcoming Tom to our team!





# **VA EXTENDS FINANCIAL, BENEFITS AND CLAIMS RELIEF TO VETERANS**

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced a number of actions to provide veterans with financial, benefits and claims help amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The financial relief actions include the following until further notice:

- Suspending all actions on veteran debts under the jurisdiction of the Treasury Department.
- Suspending collection action or extending repayment terms on preexisting VA debts, as the veteran prefers.

For benefit debts, veterans can contact the VA Debt Management Center at 1-800-827-0648 to make arrangements.

For health care debts, veterans can contact the Health Resource Center at 1-877-222-8387 to make arrangements.

The benefits and claims relief actions include giving veterans the option to submit their paperwork late for the following actions:

- perfecting claims
- challenging adverse decisions
- submitting Notices of Disagreement
- submitting Substantive Appeals
- responding to Supplemental Statements of the Case

Veterans requesting claim extensions can simply submit them with any late-filed paperwork and veterans do not have to proactively request an extension in advance. For added convenience, the VA will also accept typed/digital signatures instead of wet signatures on its forms. Those with questions can call 1-800-827-1000.

For veterans who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and need immediate action on their appeals, as opposed to a filing extension, the Board of Veterans' Appeals will Advance their appeal on Docket (AOD). [Click here](#) to find out how to file for AOD and what documentation is required.

“As all Americans come together to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, we want veterans to be focused on their health and safety,” VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said. “That’s why we’re taking action to give those with pending debts, claims and appeals greater flexibility during these challenging times.”

# VA APPEALS PRODUCTION AT ALL TIME HIGH

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) VA Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board) hit a production milestone, April 1, at the fiscal year (FY) 2020 halfway point issuing more than 52,000 decisions which is approximately 15% more than the previous year.

The Board has steadily increased production during the past three years, showing continued improvement over a sustained period. In FY 2017, the Board issued 52,661 total decisions, FY 2018, 85,288 decisions and FY 2019, 90,050. The Board's mission is to conduct hearings and issue timely decisions for veterans and other appellants in compliance with the law.



"The Board's increased production ensures more veterans are receiving benefits and services during this difficult time as the nation copes with COVID-19," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This, in combination with increased virtual hearings, showcases how the VA's modernization is benefiting veterans."

In light of COVID-19 the Board has also expanded its virtual hearing capacity to hold about 250 virtual hearings per week. Virtual hearings at the Board allow veterans who have the proper technology to participate in their appeals hearings from the comfort of their own homes, instead of traveling to a VA facility.

To learn more about the Board, please visit: <https://www.bva.va.gov/>

# **FUNDS AVAILABLE THROUGH CARES ACT FOR NON-PROFITS PROVIDING SHELTER FOR HOMELESS**

South Dakota Housing Development Authority (SDHDA) is inviting nonprofits and units of local government to submit applications for funding from the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) program.

Per the CARES Act, South Dakota has initially received an allocation of \$2,199,893 of special ESG program funds to be used to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) among individuals and families who are homeless or receiving homeless assistance; and to support additional homeless assistance and homelessness prevention activities to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19.

To expediate funding, SDHDA will be accepting applications until April 17, 2020, with awards to be made by April 24, 2020.

The ESG program allocation plan and application can be found on SDHDA's website at [www.sdhda.org](http://www.sdhda.org).

SDHDA will open the regular 2020 ESG application cycle in May with applications due May 29, 2020. Agencies should keep in mind available funding under both allocations and apply based on their capacity to administer the funds.

For more information, contact Denise Albertson at 605.773.3181 or [denise@sdhda.org](mailto:denise@sdhda.org).



# CARES ACT HELPING VA BOOST PROTECTIONS FOR VETERANS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has begun implementing the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act or CARES Act, signed into law March 27, to protect America's Veterans. The CARES Act is best known as the law providing \$2.2 trillion in economic relief to Americans and has language critical to ensuring the safety of veterans.

"President Trump signed this legislation into law with a sharp eye on ensuring the safety of our nation's Veterans," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Since the President signed the CARES Act, the VA has been moving quickly to implement the President's intent to hire new staff, take care of homeless veterans, use our cutting-edge telehealth technology to keep appointments, help state-run veterans homes."

The bill contains important funding increases in support of the VA's nationwide response to the challenge.

This includes \$17.2 billion for the Veterans Health Administration, where money is already being used, to hire new staff and make sure existing personnel have the resources they need to deal with the evolving needs of the pandemic.

The funding has also been used to add beds, provide overtime pay and purchase needed supplies such as ventilators, pharmaceuticals and personal protective equipment.

Other CARES Act benefits to veterans includes:

**Homelessness**—Increasing the amount to support the additional costs of aiding veterans in today's more difficult economic circumstances. Before the CARES Act, VA provided up to \$48.50 per day for each veteran that grantees assist. Expecting loan servicers to comply with all home loan related provisions of the CARES Act, giving borrowers the right to loan forbearance upon request and protecting against foreclosures, evictions and adverse credit reporting. During the COVID-19 emergency, servicers must also comply with all other federal, state and local requirements implemented to address the servicing of home loans.

**Telehealth**—Allowing the VA to enter into short-term agreements with telecommunications companies to deliver free or subsidized support for mental health services through a telehealth connection or the VA's Video Connect service. Working to ensure veterans participating in the HUD-VA Supportive Housing program (HUD-VASH) have access to telehealth equipment.

**State Veterans Homes**—Waiving a requirement that the VA state homes maintain a 90% occupancy rate in order to receive federal benefits for times when the veteran is not in the home. The change recognizes the importance of social distancing, especially among the older veteran population. Permitting State Veterans Homes to admit more spouses of veterans and Gold Star parents. Additionally, the CARES Act law allocates \$150 million for emergency State Veterans Home construction and \$2.15 billion for information technology.



# SENATORS URGE VA TO EXPAND TELEMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR VETERANS

U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) joined Senate Veterans' Affairs Chairman Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) and members of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee to send a letter to United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Robert Wilkie urging the VA to use the authority granted in the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act* to expand telemental health services to veterans during COVID-19.

A provision was included in the *CARES Act* that would permit the VA to form agreements with telecommunications companies to help provide mental health services to veterans isolated due to the risk of spreading COVID-19. Both veterans who live in rural areas and veterans who are experiencing social isolation to prevent the spread of the virus may experience increased mental health challenges; this provision allows veterans to access the care they need during this time.

"Veterans with underlying mental health conditions, including clinical-level anxiety and depression, those who live alone or who already have subjective feelings of loneliness, those concerned about employment and their financial situations, and those with a history of self-medication using alcohol and drugs, are all at an increased risk of suicide during this time," the senators wrote.

"Additionally, veterans who live in rural areas, medically underserved and unserved parts of the U.S. may also be at increased risk, and are also in need of these enhanced mental health services. Unfortunately, many veterans who are at increased risk of suicide lack reliable and cost-efficient access to fixed broadband and mobile connectivity services."

In addition to Rounds and Chairman Moran, the letter was signed by Ranking Member Jon Tester (D-Mont.) and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee members John Boozman (R-Ark.), Bill Cassidy (R-La.), Thom Tillis (R-N.C.), Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.), Kevin Cramer (R-N.D.) and Kelly Loeffler (R-Ga.).



# SOCIAL SECURITY UPDATE

## *Statement from Social Security Commissioner Andrew Saul about COVID-19 Economic Impact Payments for Beneficiaries*

"I want to provide an update to people who receive benefits from the Social Security Administration. The Department of the Treasury (Treasury) announced on April 1 that Social Security beneficiaries who are not typically required to file tax returns will not need to file an abbreviated tax return to receive an economic impact payment. The IRS will use the information on the Form SSA-1099 to generate \$1,200 economic impact payments to Social Security beneficiaries who did not file tax returns in 2018 or 2019.

Treasury, not Social Security, will make automatic payments to Social Security beneficiaries. Beneficiaries will receive these payments by direct deposit or by paper check, just as they would normally receive their Social Security benefits.

For updates from the IRS, visit [www.irs.gov/coronavirus](http://www.irs.gov/coronavirus).

### **Note for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Recipients:**

We are working closely with Treasury to address outstanding questions about our SSI recipients in an attempt to make the issuance of economic impact payments as quick and efficient as possible. We realize people are concerned, and the IRS will provide additional information at [www.irs.gov/coronavirus](http://www.irs.gov/coronavirus) when available. Please note that we will not consider economic impact payments as income for SSI recipients, and the payments are excluded from resources for 12 months.

We will continue to update Social Security's COVID-19 web page at [www.socialsecurity.gov/coronavirus/](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/coronavirus/) as further details become available."

To get more Social Security news, follow the Press Office on Twitter [@SSAPress](https://twitter.com/SSAPress)





**WEAR  
PURPLE  
FRIDAY  
APRIL 17th**

April is a time to recognize and thank our military children and youth for their contributions, strength and service.

There are over 6,400 military youth in South Dakota.

Join us in celebrating them!

Show your support and wear Purple! Join the SDNG Child & Youth Program and communities nationwide in honoring our military youth.

Wear purple on Friday, April 17th, for Purple Up for Military Kids Day in South Dakota.

Purple is the color that symbolizes all branches of the Military.

Help us to create a "sea of purple" as a visible salute to our military youth.



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# THANK YOU FOR ALL THE MASKS — KEEP ‘EM COMING

Big Shout out and thank you to all our volunteers that have sewn and donated cloth masks for the non-medical team at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home. YOU ARE THE BEST! Keep “em coming!!!!

We have heard of some great stories of businesses that are volunteering to cut the material out for free for sewers. Another big “thank you.”

#Loving South Dakota and all our great volunteers!



Never  
under  
estimate  
the  
power  
of a  
woman  
with a  
sewing  
machine.





Coming to you "LIVE" during MOMC  
Month of the Military Child

↑ PURPLE UP for Military Kids

Virtual Child & Youth Events

SDNG "online" Child & Youth Programming isn't cancelled!!

Join us on Facebook to participate

Military Family challenges and more

Facebook LIVE EVENTS --- "SPIRIT DAYS"

Resources

SDNG YOUTH PROGRAM

LIKE us on Facebook to join the fun

## PARTNERS THAT KEEP ON GIVING

These beautiful cloth face masks were delivered to the State Veterans Home for our non-medical staff.

Not only were they sewn --- but quilted!

Special thanks to the members of the Minnekahta Quilters Guild for these lovely pieces of art!





# UPCOMING EVENTS

## Apr 17—Purple Up Day in South Dakota

May 8—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)  
May 10—Mothers Day  
May 19—SDDVA Mini Conference—Rapid City—10:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)  
May 20—SDDVA Mini Conference—Pierre—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)  
May 21—SDDVA Mini Conference—Sioux Falls—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)  
May 25—MJFSVH Memorial Day Car Show—MJFSVH Campus—Hot Springs—11:30 am—3:00 pm (MT)  
May 25—Memorial Day  
May 25—State Offices closed  
Jun 3-7—VFW State Convention—Aberdeen  
Jun 14—Flag Day  
Jun 18-21—American Legion State Convention—Huron  
Jun 21—Fathers Day  
Jun 27—DAV State Convention—DAV Headquarters—Sioux Falls  
Jul 6—Black Hills National Cemetery Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)  
Jul 10—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Bldg. 145—Room 108—Fort Meade VAMC—10:00 am (MT)  
Aug 22—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 7  
Aug 24-27—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—Ramkota Conference Center—Pierre  
Sep 3—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair  
Sep 3-7—SD State Fair  
Sep 5—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 8  
Sep 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)  
Sep 19—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 9  
Oct 10—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 10  
Oct 26-30—National Summit on Women Veterans Issues (more information coming)  
Nov 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

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